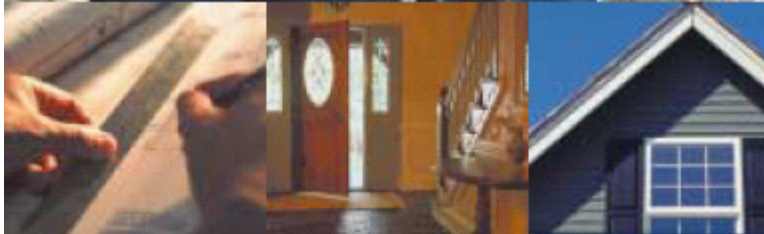


How to Find a Professional Remodeler



If you own a home, no matter what its age, sooner or later you may join the millions of people who remodel their homes each year. The reasons for remodeling are as varied as the projects themselves. Remodeling adds comfort, convenience, space, and value to what is for most homeowners their most valuable asset.

If you are considering a remodeling project, this brochure will help you find a professional remodeler among the many people who seek your business. Your home is too important to entrust to anyone but a professional remodeler who can:

- ▶ Save you money by doing your job right the first time.
- ▶ Ensure that your dreams are accurately translated into reality by offering design services in-house or through an arrangement with a professional architect or designer.
- ▶ Understand that your comfort during the project and its successful completion depend on effective communication and follow-through.
- ▶ Maintain a safe and neat jobsite to prevent damage to your home or injury to household members and pets.
- ▶ Provide the best possible materials within your budget and assist you in making selections through the vendors they work with.
- ▶ Ensure that your job meets or exceeds applicable building codes and regulations.
- ▶ Guarantee the quality of their work with a warranty.
- ▶ Respond promptly to service calls and inquiries.



The Search for a Professional Remodeler

Where to Begin

- ▶ Develop an idea of what you want to do. Write a prioritized list of your needs and wants. Look at magazines and Web sites and collect pictures of what you like. The more clearly you can envision the project and describe it on paper, the more likely you are to convey a clear image of your project to a professional remodeler.
- ▶ Think about traffic patterns, furniture size and placement, colors, lighting and how you expect to use the remodeled space.
- ▶ Figure out how much money you have to spend on the remodeling job, the furnishings and the landscaping (if any). If necessary, talk to lenders and find out how much you can borrow and at what cost.

Seek referrals from:

- ▶ local trade associations, such as your area's local home builders association and local Remodelers™ Council.
- ▶ friends, family, neighbors, coworkers and others who have had remodeling work done.
- ▶ independent trade contractors, building materials suppliers, architects, engineers, home inspectors, local lenders and insurance professionals.

Once you have developed a list of potential contractors:

- ▶ Check with your local or state office of consumer protection and the local Better Business Bureau. Ask if they have had any complaints about the remodeler? If so, were those complaints resolved satisfactorily?
- ▶ Check with your state's licensing agency and the state and local building inspectors to see if they have received any complaints about the remodeler and to verify that the remodeler has the appropriate licenses and registrations.

What to Look for & What to Ask

When you hire a remodeler, you are buying a service rather than a product. The quality of the service the remodeler provides will determine the quality of the finished product and your satisfaction with the result. Here are some qualifications you will want to explore and questions you will want to ask when interviewing a remodeler.

BUSINESS EXPERIENCE & MANAGEMENT

Does the remodeler:

- ▶ Maintain a permanent mailing address, e-mail address, published personal phone number, fax number, cell phone, pager, or voice-messaging system? You will want to be able to reach the remodeler quickly and easily throughout the process, especially at critical times.
- ▶ Carry insurance that protects you from claims arising from property damage or jobsite injuries?
 - ▶ Ask for a copy of the remodeler's insurance certificates so you can be sure you will not be liable in these situations for property damage or jobsite-related injuries.
 - ▶ Ask the remodeler how much the project will add to your home's value and obtain the necessary additional insurance.
- ▶ Have an established presence in the community?
 - ▶ How long has the company been in business under this name? Longevity suggests financial stability.
 - ▶ Does the remodeler maintain solid relationships with experienced independent trade contractors such as plumbers and electricians and work with them as a team to keep your job running smoothly?
- ▶ Possess a trustworthy reputation among customers, peers, local officials and people involved in all aspects of the industry?
 - ▶ Does the remodeler have a track record of successful projects similar to the one you are planning?
 - ▶ Ask for a list of building materials suppliers and call them to see if the remodeler has an account or pays for materials on delivery. Most suppliers are willing to extend credit to financially sound companies.
- ▶ Actively participate in a trade organization such as the Remodelers™ Council of the National Association of Home Builders? This and similar organizations help to keep their members informed about new products, construction techniques, business practices and industry issues. Participation demonstrates a remodeler's commitment to professionalism and the remodeling industry.
 - ▶ Has the remodeler earned any professional designations? Through certification programs, these organizations confer designations such as Certified Graduate Remodeler (CGR), Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist (CAPS), Certified Bath Designer (CBD) or Certified Kitchen Designer (CKD) to those who meet the requirements.
 - ▶ How long has the remodeler you are considering been a member of these associations?

CONSTRUCTION & TECHNICAL EXPERTISE

Does the remodeler:

- ▶ Have a working knowledge of the types and ages of homes in the area. Knowing what is likely to be behind a wall or under a floor helps the remodeler to provide reliable estimates. An extremely low bid may indicate lack of experience and an inability to later cover the actual costs involved in the job and create unnecessary change orders.
 - ▶ What products and materials would the remodeler be likely to use for your project?
 - ▶ Does the remodeler offer an array of options and thus demonstrate knowledge of and experience with a variety of products, materials, and techniques?
- ▶ Specialize particular types of projects?
- ▶ Arrange for the building permit? The person who obtains the permit is the contractor of record and therefore liable for making sure the work complies with codes.
- ▶ Offer a warranty? If so, what kind and for how long?
 - ▶ What is covered under the warranty and what is not?
- ▶ Agree to begin and complete your job within a reasonable timetable?

CUSTOMER SERVICE & COMMUNICATION

Does the remodeler:

- ▶ Respond promptly to your inquiries?
- ▶ Schedule meetings and attend them on time?
- ▶ Emphasize service and developing a trusting relationship with you?
- ▶ Listen to and understand your needs and wants and work with you to ensure that the plans for your job accurately reflect your expectations?
 - ▶ When discussing your written priorities, does the remodeler show enthusiasm for your ideas and suggest ways to make them work within your budget?
 - ▶ Ask the remodeler for examples of how the company has solved similar space problems for other customers.
- ▶ Facilitate communication among all parties involved in the project?
 - ▶ Will the remodeler provide you with schedule updates so you can make appropriate decisions and prepare for any unavoidable inconveniences?
 - ▶ Ask how the company handles communications during the construction phase of the job such as a message center in the house and regularly scheduled site meetings for communication between you and the remodeling team, including the designers, architect and independent trade contractors.



Interview Previous or Present Customers

Before you sign a contract:

- ▶ Ask the remodeler to share with you names, phone numbers and/or e-mail addresses of some customers and take the time to see the remodeler's work.
- ▶ Ask to see jobs similar to yours.
 - ▶ Does the quality of the work meet your standards?

Ask the remodeler's customers:

- ▶ Would you hire this company again?
- ▶ Did the remodeler maintain a neat jobsite, provide regular clean-up and haul away debris including personal trash?
- ▶ Did the remodeler keep labor and materials delays to a minimum so that your job could be started and completed on time and within budget?
- ▶ Did you find the remodeler easy to work with? Did the remodeler keep you informed as the job progressed?
- ▶ Did the remodeler supply you with paperwork in a timely fashion?
- ▶ How well did the remodeler deal with the problems that arose?

Make the Decision

- ▶ Ask yourself if you feel comfortable with the remodeler and confident that this company will do the work according to your plans, budget and specifications.
- ▶ If you are satisfied with the answers to your questions, ask for a written estimate of the work to be done based on a set of plans and specifications. Be prepared to pay for this package. If the estimated cost of the project is more than you can afford, see if you can trim something from the project or postpone part of it so you can still work with a professional remodeler.
- ▶ Ask the remodeler to explain the plans and specifications and company procedures to you. For instance, once construction begins, how does the company handle changes to the initial design, choice of materials or schedule. If you compare one estimate with another, be sure each one is based upon the same set of plans, specifications and scope of work. If your remodeler suggests any deviations, ask the remodeler to present them as options separate from the main proposal.
- ▶ Find out whether the remodeler uses a detailed, written contract that protects both of you and that complies with local, state and federal laws. The contract must spell out the work that will and will not be performed and provide a fair payment schedule.
- ▶ Select the remodeler with a track record of a variety of excellent projects and plenty of experience with your type of project. Beware of an exceptionally low price.

Signs of a Professional Remodeler

▶ NAHB REMODELORS™ COUNCIL



Membership in the NAHB Remodelors™ Council indicates a remodeler's commitment to professional-quality construction that meets

or exceeds industry standards and practices, responsible business management and reliable customer and warranty service. Members of the Council have forged an extensive program of education and information to aid remodelers in all facets of their businesses and to improve professionalism in the remodeling industry. NAHB remodelers have access to business and technical information, assistance from staff professionals who are experts in a variety of disciplines from accessibility to zoning, and training and education programs for increasing business, technical and communication skills. The NAHB Remodelors™ Council was founded in 1982. "Remodelor" is the trademarked identifier of NAHB members active in the remodeling industry.

▶ CERTIFIED GRADUATE REMODELOR™ (CGR)



The CGR designation indicates that a remodeler has completed the requirements of the CGR program, including educational credits and certain prescribed standards of business experience and

practices. If your remodeler has earned the CGR designation, you can be assured that he or she is a concerned professional who understands the value of continuing education and is ready to do his or her best for you.

▶ CERTIFIED AGING-IN-PLACE SPECIALIST (CAPS)



Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist
Houses For Living. Homes For Life.

Developed by the NAHB Remodelors™ Council, in collaboration with AARP, the NAHB Research Center and the NAHB Seniors Housing Council, the CAPS program teaches the technical skills, cus-

tommer service, marketing, and business management skills necessary to understand the expanding market for home modifications for aging in place. Remodelers who earn the CAPS designation demonstrate the specialized skills needed to serve consumers who want to live in their own homes as they age.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:



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